

issues - womens issues

Women's Issues

Representative Louise Slaughter is an outspoken national champion of women's rights. As the Co-Chair of the Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues ("Women's Caucus") for the 108th Congress, which has worked to improve women's lives since 1977, Rep. Slaughter has spearheaded bills in Congress to address the sexual assault of women in the military and the promotion of equal opportunity under Title IX. She constantly fights for the equality and rights of women, calling for awareness and action both in the U.S. and abroad.

Below you will find further information regarding Rep. Slaughter's efforts for women.

International Women's Issues

Rep. Slaughter and Women's Caucus Members have worked hard to draw attention to and eliminate violations of basic human rights of women and children throughout the globe. During the 108th Congress, they have worked on many significant issues affecting international women's human rights, such as female genital mutilation, child marriage, trafficking in women and girls, women and HIV/AIDS, maternal mortality, women and hunger, basic education for girls, and violence against women.

Women's Caucus Members have particularly highlighted the importance of supporting equality for women in Iraq and Afghanistan, two countries on the forefront of U.S. foreign policy during the 108th Congress through briefings, meetings, letters and legislation including "The Iraqi Women and Children's Liberation Act." This bill will inspire Iraqi women with the tools needed to empower themselves with political participation, reduce maternal and infant mortality, advance girls education, reduce poverty, and sustain democracy for themselves and their children. Almost twice as many men as women in Iraq are literate; the maternal mortality rate is 35 times higher than in the United States; and one in eight children dies before the age of five because of inadequate health care. In Afghanistan, girls' schools have been violently attacked and burned down; threats have been made against women working and taking off the burqa and girls attending school; and there are numerous reports of violence against women, including sexual assault and rape. One of the best ways for the U. S. to ensure the legacy of democracy in Iraq and Afghanistan is by helping these countries invest in their women and children.

Bipartisan efforts by Women's Caucus Members have lead to successes in increased funding levels in the Foreign Operations Appropriations bill for programs supporting women and girls overseas, such as the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM, <http://www.unifem.org/>). UNIFEM supports innovative programs promoting women's basic human rights and status throughout more than 100 countries. The agency works in partnership with UN organizations, governments and NGOs to reduce women's poverty, end violence against women, halt and reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS, and support women's roles in conflict prevention and reconstruction efforts. UNIFEM projects promote peace and stability on the ground in many areas of strategic interest to the U.S., such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Columbia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the former Soviet Union. Helping to pave the way from conflict to constitution in Iraq, the organization has supported organizations advocating for women's political rights and

participation. UNIFEM has also been working to stem the tide of violence against women throughout the world by administering the Trust Fund to Support Actions to Eliminate Violence Against Women.

Women's Caucus Members have also been actively involved in drawing attention to the murders of young women in Ciudad Juarez and Chihuahua, Mexico. Since 1993, women and girls in these cities have lived in fear of being the target of sexual assault and murder. Since that time, the bodies of over 370 girls and women have been found, while hundreds more remain missing. These women are usually kidnapped on their way to and from work (including American-owned maquiladora factories) or school, and are often raped and mutilated before being killed. Many of these crimes have been unresolved and until recently the Mexican government was unresponsive. The Women's caucus has taken an active role in speaking out against these murders by hosting several briefings and leading a Congressional Delegation to Ciudad Juarez. Women's Caucus Members have also introduced H.RES.466, which formally condemns the abductions and murders of young women in Ciudad Juarez, supports the creation of a DNA database that would allow families to identify victims' remains, and opposes the use of torture as a means of investigation to these crimes.

Education, Athletics and Title IX

Rep. Slaughter has been leading the charge to uphold the federal government's commitment to Title IX, the women's educational fairness and equity law. Enacted in 1972, Title IX of the Education Amendments requires federally funded schools to provide comparable educational and athletic opportunities for both females and males. However, while female participation in sports has greatly increased, women still remain underrepresented in elementary, high school and college athletics with regard to the availability of opportunities, resources and scholarship funding.

In order to help remedy these disparities, Rep. Slaughter and the Women's Caucus leadership introduced H.R. 595, the "High School Athletics Accountability Act," along with 63 bipartisan cosponsors. This bill will help high schools improve opportunities for girls in sports, and thereby encourage the participation of both girls and boys in athletics. The High School Athletics Accountability Act requires that high schools report basic data on the number of female and male students in their athletic programs and the expenditures made for their sports teams. Currently high schools are not required to disclose any data on equity in sports, making it difficult for high schools and parents to ensure fairness in their athletics programs. Better information can help high schools and parents of schoolchildren foster fairness in athletic opportunities for girls and boys.

Additionally, Rep. Slaughter has defended Title IX against attempts to weaken its effectiveness and implementation. In June 2005, Rep. Slaughter sent a letter to President Bush with over 50 other Democrats asking him to withdraw the Education Department's new damaging "Clarification" on Title IX. The "Clarification" significantly weakens Title IX by allowing schools to rely solely on the results of a single survey, which can be administered through e-mail, to gauge women's interest in athletics and demonstrate compliance with Title IX.

In addition to addressing women and girls in sports, Women's Caucus Members have drawn attention to the importance of encouraging girls in non-traditional fields such as science, math, engineering and technology; training for displaced homemakers and single parents; improving girls' self-esteem; and supporting basic education for girls in developing countries around the world.

Violence Against Women

Since its inception, the Women's Caucus has focused on the elimination of violence against women and has supported programs to assist victims of violence. The epidemic of violence against women in the United States and around the world remains significant, and Women's Caucus Members have urged Congress to commit more resources to help eliminate this problem and provide assistance to survivors. Nearly one-third of American women report being physically or sexually abused by a husband or boyfriend at some point in their lives. Recent reports of assaults on women in the military and by college athletes on female students indicate that this problem is still rampant. Around the world, at least one in every three women has been beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused during her lifetime.

Rep. Slaughter commemorated the 10th anniversary of the Violence Against Women Act in 2004 by releasing a new CRS report on the benefits brought about by this law as well as the problems that still need to be addressed. In conjunction with Lifetime TV for Women, the Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues participated in the annual Stop Violence Against Women Week in March, including briefings, special orders, public service announcements and other initiatives to highlight the importance of bringing an end to violence against women.

During the 108th Congress, Rep. Slaughter and the Women's Caucus have brought national attention to the issue of sexual assault and other aspects of violence against women in the military (see also the information on "Women in the Military" on this website). The Women's Caucus also successfully advocated for U.S. funding for the global Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence Against Women, administered by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), which was the first time the U.S. has ever funded this program. Women Members have also addressed specific issues such as violence against women in conflict situations, gender-based asylum for women, the role of men in preventing violence against women, commercially and sexually exploited youth, gender-based violence and women's health, and transitional housing for victims of domestic violence.

Women in the Workplace, Business, and the Economy

Rep. Slaughter has led Women's Caucus Members in the 108th Congress in raising issues of concern to women in the workplace and women small business owners. For example, they have highlighted the law that Congress passed in 1996 setting a goal of 5% for women and minority-owned businesses in all government contracts. While few agencies meet or exceed the contracting goals, the Department of Defense (DOD) has been one of the worst offenders. In May of 2003, Rep. Slaughter and several other women Members from both parties met with the DOD Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization at the Department to discuss the \$200 billion contract awarded to Lockheed Martin to build the Joint Strike Fighter. Of that \$200 billion dollar contract, only \$1.1 million in contracts had gone to women small business owners. At the meeting, women Members helped the Department develop a strategy for reaching out to and contracting with women-owned businesses (either through primes or subcontracts), and to encourage Lockheed Martin to subcontract out to women-owned businesses on the Joint Strike Fighter to meet or exceed the 5% goal. Members of the Women's Caucus participated in an additional meeting in July 2004 to discuss the progress that the Department was making to ensure equity in contracting opportunities. The Members also requested that representatives from Lockheed Martin and Pratt and Whitney discuss their plans to meet the congressionally mandated 5% contracting goal.

Rep. Slaughter and Members of the Women's Caucus have also highlighted other issues affecting working women throughout the 108th Congress, such as the need for improved child care, preschool and after school care for children, diversity in the workforce, career training for displaced homemakers and single parents, the glass ceiling and the gender gap in wages, employment issues faced by women with disabilities, balancing work and family, supporting Women's Business Centers, and addressing gender disparities in the fields of math, science, engineering and technology.

Women in the Military

Rep. Slaughter and the Women's Caucus have made significant progress in drawing national attention to the problem of sexual assault of women in the military, which has been a primary concern of the caucus during the 108th Congress. In March, 2004, the Congresswoman led a hearing on this issue and presented a report containing the transcript of the hearing to U.S. Department of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. Following the hearing, on May, 2004, the U.S. House unanimously passed an amendment championed by Rep. Slaughter that would require the Pentagon to develop a comprehensive and uniform policy to prevent and respond to sexual assault of women in the military. The Women's Caucus has also focused on the issue of domestic violence within the U.S. military by working with the Department of Defense to find appropriate mechanisms to prevent and respond to this problem. In addition, Rep. Slaughter is working to develop comprehensive legislation addressing multifaceted aspects of both sexual assault and domestic violence within the military in order to ensure that women are not subject to violence and assault by members of the U.S. Armed Forces.

The Women's Caucus also supports women serving our nation in the military by honoring distinguished women officers serving in each of the five branches of the U.S. Armed Forces at a ceremony for them before Memorial Day each year.

Women's Health

As an outspoken supporter of increased efforts in women's health research and services, Rep. Slaughter has worked throughout her entire career in Congress to educate her colleagues, women, and the public at large about the importance of these issues and to craft legislative initiatives to improve women's health. She has highlighted women's health priorities through the Women's Caucus as Co-Chair in the 108th Congress, Vice-Chair in the 107th Congress and as leader of the Women's Caucus Health Task Force during the 106th Congress.

Rep. Slaughter's activities on women's health during her tenure as Co-Chair of the Women's Caucus in the 108th Congress have focused on a broad range of issues including breast cancer research, genetic nondiscrimination, advocacy and education, female genital mutilation, and women's environmental health. For example, based on emerging research on the potential impact of environmental estrogens and other factors on women's health, Rep. Slaughter has authored H.R. 852, the Environmental Health Research Act. This bill accomplishes two goals. It funds six multidisciplinary centers of excellence through the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) to study women's health and disease prevention. It also increases funding to NIEHS specifically to study the effects of environmental toxins on endocrine development and hormone disruption. The research programs authorized through this legislation will enable NIEHS to gather solid data about the dangers posed by some chemicals and the mechanisms through which they act. With this information in hand, policymakers can make sensible, informed decisions and policies about women's health and well-being.

During the 108th Congress, the Women's Caucus has spearheaded a wide variety of additional efforts to address women's health, such as a women's preventative health summit addressing smoking and obesity, an event launching the Go Red for Women Initiative to address women and heart disease in conjunction with the American Heart Association, a briefing on gender-based violence and women's health, a town hall meeting on women and diabetes, and many other initiatives.

Women's History and Heritage

In order to recognize the great achievements of the women who helped change the status of women in American society, Rep. Slaughter and the other leaders of the Women's Caucus spearheaded H.CON.RES 413. This resolution calls upon the American people to study, reflect upon and celebrate the accomplishments of the women who served our nation during World War II, who collectively became known as "Rosie the Riveter." Rosie the Riveter became the symbol for all of the women who entered the workforce, taking the place of the men who went away to war, to help ensure the United States victory in that conflict. The Women's Caucus leaders also helped spearhead a letter to the U.S. Secretary of the Navy encouraging him to name a ship the U.S.S. Rosie the Riveter to honor the Rosies who are still with us and in memory of the millions of Rosies who have passed away.

In the 108th Congress, Rep. Slaughter, along with Sen. Clinton, introduced legislation to establish Votes for Women History Trail, which would link sites in New York State that were in the women's suffrage movement. The Votes for Women History Trail Act, H.R. 1524, establishes an auto-route connecting sites significant to women's struggle to attain the right to vote and other civil rights. The Votes for Women History Trail Act was based on Rep. Slaughter's years of dedication to ensuring that due recognition is given to the women's movement in the United States. During the 150th anniversary of the first Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls in 1998, Rep. Slaughter organized a delegation of

current and former women Members of Congress to participate in these and related events in Rochester, NY. She served as an active facilitator and advisor in planning the Seneca Falls 150th anniversary events, and joined First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton on the stage to speak during the celebration's inaugural ceremonies.

In the 106th Congress, Rep. Slaughter secured funding for the National Park Service to study the establishment of such a trail, with a significant portion of the network located in the Western New York area. The network would link a variety of sites important to women's history, such as the Women's Rights National Historical Park, the Susan B. Anthony House, and the Harriet Tubman House. In July 2000, Rep. Slaughter was honored to be elected Chair of the Women's Progress Commemoration Commission (WPCC), a body created by legislation she had previously authored and successfully passed through Congress in 1998. In 2001, during the events commemorating the 153rd anniversary of the First Women's Rights Convention, Rep. Slaughter was proud to release the final report and recommendations of the WPCC at the Women's Rights National Historic Park in Seneca Falls, NY. This report outlined seven important steps that can be taken to preserve sites important to women's history. To review a copy of the report, please visit: <http://www.nps.gov/wori/historysites.htm>.

Rep. Slaughter has been involved in a number of other efforts on women's history. She spoke at the unveiling of the portrait of former Congresswoman Mary Norton (1875-1959) in its new location in Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi's office in celebration of Women's History Month in March 2004. Rep. Slaughter also actively promoted moving the historic Women's Suffrage Statue of Susan B. Anthony, Lucretia Mott, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton from the Capitol's basement into the Rotunda and delivered a speech at the celebration marking the placement of the monument in the Rotunda.